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Von Drehle, David. "The Case Against Summer Vacation." *Time*. Time, Inc., 22 July 2010: 36. Web. 5 Aug. 2010.

*The following is excerpted from an abridged version of an article that appears in the August 2, 2010 print edition of Time, a weekly magazine.*

Blame Tom Sawyer: Americans have a skewed view of childhood and summertime. We associate the school year with oppression and the summer months with liberty. School is regimen; summer is creativity. School is work and summer is play. But when American students are competing with children around the globe who may be spending four weeks longer in school each year, larking through summer is a luxury we can't afford. What's more, for many children — especially children of low-income families — summer is a season of boredom, inactivity and isolation.

Deprived of healthy stimulation, millions of low-income kids lose a significant amount of what they learn during the school year. Call it "summer learning loss," as the academics do, or "the summer slide," but by any name summer is among the most pernicious — if least acknowledged — causes of achievement gaps in America's schools. Children with access to high-quality experiences can exercise their minds and bodies at sleep-away camp, on family vacations, in museums and libraries and enrichment classes. Meanwhile, children without resources languish on street corners or in front of glowing screens. By the time the bell rings on a new school year, the poorer kids have fallen weeks, if not months, behind. And even well-off American students may be falling behind their peers around the world.

And what starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. A major study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University concluded that while students made similar progress during the school year, regardless of economic status, the better-off kids held steady or continued to advance during the summer — while disadvantaged students fell back. By the end of grammar school, low-income students had fallen nearly three grade levels behind. By ninth grade, roughly two-thirds of the learning gap separating income groups could be blamed on summer learning loss.

"There is an idyllic view of summer, but we've known for decades that the reality is very different for a lot of underprivileged kids," says Ron Fairchild, CEO of a non-profit organization in Baltimore called the National Summer Learning Association.

Fairchild and his organization are part of a growing movement to stop the summer slide by coordinating, expanding, and improving summer enrichment programs — especially for low-income children. Supporters include some of the nation's largest private foundations. But as reformers strive to redeem summer as an educational resource, the trick is to seize the opportunity without destroying what's best about the season: the possibility of fun and freedom and play.